



August 24, 2020

Representative Kitty Toll, Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
Representative Kate Webb, Chair
House Committee on Education

Dear Representatives Toll and Webb:

We write today to urge you to reject the proposed \$40,000 cut to Outright Vermont as recommended in the AOE's Restated FY21 Budget request. Now more than ever, Vermont's teachers and students need the critical, comprehensive assistance and guidance provided by Outright Vermont to support our vulnerable LGBTQ youth.

In FY20, the Legislature recognized the invaluable, life-saving nature of our work, and appropriated \$60,000 to the Agency of Education (AOE) base budget directed specifically to Outright Vermont. Early this summer, AOE told us to plan for \$55,200 - or an 8% reduction - as they were anticipating a reduction in their General Fund appropriations. Last week we found out they are now recommending a 66% reduction in the base appropriation for Outright.

The Agency of Education (AOE) does not have a designated strategy to support Vermont schools in addressing the urgent needs of LGBTQ youth. Our evidence-based education programming fills a crucial gap the state cannot meet on its own. We have been a partner to the AOE for years, providing resources and support they are not positioned to offer.

As you can imagine, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of Vermont's LGBTQ youth. In the best of circumstances, LGBTQ youth navigate instability on multiple levels. In Vermont, that is compounded by the isolation they face living in small, rural communities, where they may never even meet another person - peer or adult - who shares their identity.

As the pandemic unfolded, we conducted a Needs Assessment to better understand how LGBTQ youth were being impacted around the state. More than 100 youth responded to our survey, the majority sharing themes on:

"School was my safe space away from home, and now I have nowhere to go to get away from my transphobic, unaccepting family."

"It has really cut me off from the world. I don't have a phone, so staying connected is hard sometimes, and I struggle without having people to share my thoughts with."

Our Assessment, and the follow up work we've done, indicate the following impacts of the pandemic on Vermont's LGBTQ youth:

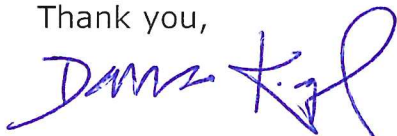
- While all youth are navigating increased isolation, for those in quarantine with unsupportive families, the lack of access to affirming peers and adults can be deadly. Schools are often that bridge to finding support. For youth who are not out, or are navigating rejecting families, they are without a crucial safety.
- Increased mental and/or physical health challenges stemming from less access to healthcare providers, counselors, and wellness routines.
- Increased isolation and reduced access to school resources and a sense of community (GSA peers and advisors, school counselors, supports for learning disabilities).
- Students without stable internet or a device are almost completely isolated from peers and supports.

The importance of the State's funding, given the vast uncertainty pervading all aspects of our social and economic landscape in the midst of a global pandemic, cannot be understated.

Outright can transform the State's investment of \$60,000 into a year of life-saving services. Outright is poised to provide teachers, administrators, and leaders the knowledge they need to see these vulnerable youth through these unprecedented times. This work doesn't just uplift LGBTQ youth. It creates a lens of social justice, equity, and hope that improves the lives of all our youth, and everyone who works with them.

In the midst of a global pandemic that is wreaking further havoc on the lives of some of Vermont's most vulnerable youth this funding is that much more vital to their health and well-being. Please restore the proposed cut to Outright Vermont.

Thank you,



Dana Kaplan, Executive Director & CD Mattison, Outright Vermont Board Chair

2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results Summary

Behavior / Risk	LGBTQ+ Teens	Cis/Het Teens
Feel so sad or hopeless during the past year that they stopped doing some activities	63%	25%
Have hurt themselves on purpose during the past year	50%	13%
Have made a suicide plan during the past year	36%	9%
Have attempted suicide during the past year	19%	4%
Report being in a physical fight during the past year	22%	18%
Experienced electronic bullying during the past year	28%	14%
Were bullied during the past month	31%	15%
Bullied others during the past month	14%	9%
Been threatened with a weapon on school property	13%	6%
Carried a weapon on school property	7%	4%
Skipped school due to safety concerns at or on their way to or from school	13%	5%
Experienced unwanted sexual contact	38%	14%
Dated or gone out with someone who who tried to control or hurt them emotionally	43%	26%
Dated or gone out with someone who physically hurt them	15%	6%
Ridden with someone who drank alcohol or used marijuana	22% 31%	16% 22%
Driven after drinking alcohol or using marijuana.	10% 23%	5% 14%
Used a tobacco product	33%	28%
Drank alcohol	62%	55%
Used cannabis	51%	39%
Misused prescription pain reliever or stimulant	19%	10%
Attended school under the influence of alcohol or other drugs	24%	13%
Went hungry at least most of the time	4%	2%
Slept away from their home because they were kicked out, ran away, or abandoned	8%	3%
Report having a physical disability, long-term health problems, emotional problems, or a learning disability.	56%	26%
Youth Assets and Other Protective Factors	LGBTQ+ Teens	Cis/Het Teens
Typically earned A's and B's in school	70%	80%
Have at least one adult or teacher in the school they could turn to if they had a problem.	72%	79%
Believe their school has rules and consequences for behaviors	46%	58%
Feel like they matter to people in their community	37%	62%
Full Results: https://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs		

Summary of AOE Agreements and Payments to Outright VT

2/26/2019

Agreement with AOE	Start Date	End Date	Agreement Amount	Fiscal Year Payment was Made					
				2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
FY 2014 Grant	7/1/2013	6/30/2014	18,000	-	18,000	-	-	-	-
FY 2015	7/1/2014	6/30/2015	20,000	-	3,000	17,000			
Contract # 30549	12/23/2015	7/31/2016	20,000	-	-	-	20,000		
Amendment #1	8/1/2016	7/31/2017	37,394	-	-	-	18,697	18,697	
Amendment #2	8/1/2017	7/31/2018	37,000	-	-	-	-	-	37,000
Contract # 37230	10/16/2018	12/31/2018	23,662	-	-	-	-	-	23,662 *
Total Paid by Fiscal Year					21,000	17,000	38,697	18,697	60,662

* Invoices in process

Overview of Agreements and Payments

CDC Grant Received by AOE, Grants Awarded to Outright VT

FY 2014 Grant - Agreement year FY 2014 - Payment Made in FY 2015

FY 2015 Grant - Agreement for work in Fee 2015, payment made in 2016

Shift to a contract due to the type of service being provided (training)

Initial Contract for work in FY 2016 + 1st month of FY 2017, payment made in FY 2017

Amendment #1 for an additional year of work for FY 2017 + 1 month of FY 2018, partial payment made in FY 2017, the remainder made in FY 2018

Amendment #2 for an additional year of work FY 2018 + 1 month of FY 2019, full payment for services was made in FY 2019

New contract for final training to align with the availability of funds Second quarter of FY 2019, payment will be made in FY 2019.